Depot Town Rag

October 1989

Were *those* the Good Old Days?

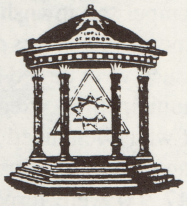
1870-1879

"Meandering" Festival facts revisited

. . . and other strictly local stuff!

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

Plaza gazebo appears



Looking a great deal like the former Ypsilanti Savings Bank's former parade float, that lovely white gazebo sitting in the center of the Market Plaza down in Depot Town makes the perfect centerpiece for fall activities on the north side of the block.

Now called Trust Corp, the bank has probably found the most appropriate home for that nearly-mobile vehicle between parade engagements. It's been the ideal setting for touring photographers since the Heritage Parade at the end of August.

If it sits down here much longer, the Engineering Society kids just might give it a fresh, new coat of white paint.

Annual DTA election chooses new & old leadership

President - Paul Fetters, owner of River Artworks, a Depot Town merchant for 11 years and chair of the Depot Town Development Authority. Fetters said, "This is the dawning of a great opportunity."

Vice President - past president, Jacob Guter, the architect who saved Detroit's Fox Theatre, noting, "It's a terrible thing to have a mind to waste."

Secretary, Mary Doll, also an architect, continuing in her post for another year and noting, "I don't mind taking notes."

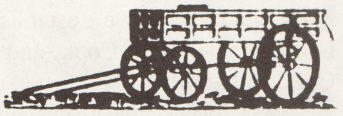
Treasurer, Judi Monaghan, who pledges to continue in her job until she gets it right.

DDA moves to fill holes

The Depot Town Development Authority has petitioned Ypsilanti City Council to adjust the district boundaries to include properties left out of the original plan. They include the Thompson Block, Miller Motors, Ted's Auto Electric, City Body, Olde Towne Coin & Gold and the garage on Ninde Street.

While public hearings are being set up on solidifying the district, DDA members are formulating an action plan to further the development of the Depot Town district.

The next DDA meeting is at 7:30 pm in the Freighthouse on Tuesday, October 12.



Farm wagon restoration

Shorty after the August Heritage Fest, the City's DPW moved in to chop up the farm wagon in the center of the Market Plaza between the Freighthouse and The Old Caboose. Remembering the fate of the beloved Box Elder which used to be in that spot, neighbors donned their Barbara Fritchie attitudes and shouted, "Shoot if you must this old grey head, but spare the district's farm wagon instead!"

The wagon has been sitting on that spot since Farm Bureau officials donated it to the City for the opening of the Farmers' Market ten years ago. Several local restorers put it into good shape in the garage of Miller Motors at that time and the weather has taken its toll since.

Early this summer Carrol Osborn came up with plans and specifications to replace the deteriorating wood and the Antique Engine Club pledged the labor and expertise to build a new bed and frame for the vehicle.

The district's kids, the Engineering Society, have painted the spokes a new coat of bright red and all that remains is to finance the $400 estimated for the wood to complete the top.

Anyone interested in helping can send their donation to "The Depot Town Association" with "Farm Wagon" also written on the check. It's tax deductible and much appreciated by kids and adults, alike, who use the old wagon as an informal meeting place.

A city harvest -- from unusual growing season

Months of regular rains created lush growth in even the sandiest flower bunkers in Depot Town this past summer. Flowers bloomed from the railroad track to the Huron River in the wildest panoply of color the district has seen in many years. River and Cross Streets have not been so lovely in decades. Noteworthy displays included . . .

- The Farmers' Market beds all around the Freighthouse and the spectacular triangle out at the main corner. Lilies bloomed until late August in the manure-laden beds and zinnias kept the tradition going after that. The bed was chock full of gorgeous blooms all season.
- Pink petunias guided the loyal clientele from the north parking lot to the entry of The Teachers Shop & Learning Center, creating a passionate parade into the district.
- Purple and pink bowers burgeoned from the bed in front of Apple Annie's & Jim MacDonald's in profuse fashion all through the growing season and the pedestrian walkway between that shop and Cross Street Antiques finally realized its potential as a very humane growing space for the first time in many years.
- The bed in front of Standard Printing was filled with golden marigolds and the bed near Aubree's reflected their facade's colors perfectly.
- Across from Hon's Flowers, the seeds finally filled the space with the usual corny 'pick-me' flowers, complemented by kastor beans and sunflowers.
- Barrels and bins lined Cross and River Streets in a continuous profusion of blooms and blossoms all through the summer while window boxes and potted plants appeared in wild profusion even in the most somber alleys of the district.

It was a glorious growing season. . . and can still be seen at the Farmers' Market.

Thanks to all who helped make it possible!

1870-1879: Post-War expansion, another railroad promotion: The Detroit, Hillsdale & Indiana Railroad

Excerpts from Colburn's

The Story of Ypsilanti

Published in 1923 for the Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the City, in Cooperation with the Committee on History composed of Carl E. Pray, Mrs. P.R. Cleary, and Miss Florence Shultes. The series of excerpts concludes with this issue.

... In 1870, O.E. Thompson, who had been a wagon maker since 1856, began the manufacture of carriages, to which he later added various lines of business. His father, Benjamin Thompson, had been one of Ypsilanti's pioneers.

... The Peck School-House, on the corner of River Street and Forest Avenue, had been converted by L.C. Wallington into a small malt-house, the building being enlarged and the business continued in 1872 by F.J. Swaine. By 1880, forty thousand bushels of malt were being produced. This old house was but recently destroyed.

... Cigar factories were established, in 1873, by Schemmeld and Cook, and in 1874, by Guild and Son.

... W.H. Sweet came to Ypsilanti in 1864, as a boy of seventeen, and clerked in the Farmers' Store kept by William Campbell, on the East Side, and for Henderson and Glover. In 1873, he formed a partnership in the dry-goods trade with William Robbins, buying out Robert Lambie, who retired from business.

William H. and James P. Deubel purchased the Huron Flouring Mill of Nathan Follett in 1873, renovating the mill and putting in the latest type of machinery. Their father, William Deubel, in the following year, bought the Ypsilanti City Mills.

The mill of the Ypsilanti Paper Company, a brick structure with stone foundations, was erected in 1874, half a mile above the Peninsular Mills, and was operated by Cornwell, Son and Brothers. An excellent water-power was developed here, with a head of seventeen feet. This was supposed to be the largest paper mill in the State of Michigan. It employed about five hundred hands. The Cornwell family was extensively engaged in the paper industry, owning, aside from the Ypsilanti mills, a pulp mill at Geddes and two paper mills in Ann Arbor. The company controlled at this time fifty-three feet of water-power on the Huron between Ypsilanti and Dexter. It also operated a wholesale paper store in Chicago.

The Peninsular Paper Company found a ready market for its products and, in 1873, completed and set in operation a second mill, on the north side of the river and directly opposite the first mill. The products of these mills were print-paper and fine book-paper. By 1880, the production had increased to fifteen hundred tons annually. One hundred and ten persons were employed, about half of whom were women and girls.

In 1871, the old building of Cornwell's Paper Mill was partially destroyed by fire, but soon the ruined portions were restored and the mill continued in successful operation, producing news-print, and supplying a large market.

A long remembered disaster took place on January 14, 1876, in the explosion of the boiler. Half the large building was blown into ruins, and the great brick chimney, nearly one hundred feet high, was overthrown. The engineer, John Max, was killed.

... The Davis grocery store, one of the older present business enterprises in the city, was established by Doctor Davis in 1878, at first under the firm name of Shier and Davis. It was located on East Cross Street next to The Farmers' Store.

... Among the curious tales of the history of Ypsilanti is the story of the promotion and building of what was known at the time as the Detroit, Hillsdale and Indiana Railroad. This road now appears in the time tables as the Ypsilanti Branch of the New York Central, and is sometimes irreverently spoken of as "The Huckleberry Line."

The suggestion for the building of the road seems to have been made to Chaucey Joslin by J.F. Joy of Detroit, who wrote him on the subject in December, 1868. Joslin was so impressed by the scheme that he went to Detroit on January 1, 1869, to confer with Joy. Later on, Joslin interviewed his legislative friends in Lansing and found some of them favorably impressed, particularly Koon, who was the representative from Hillsdale. The result was a visit of Hillsdale businessmen to Ypsilanti and the incorporation of a company. Work was soon begun on the railroad under the superintendence of Daniel Quirk, Sr. The dreams of the promoters were magnificent, and it was presumed that great benefit would be incurred by Ypsilanti from the location here of extensive shops, but from the beginning the enterprise was steadfastly opposed by some, including Doctor Rexford, Charles King and Captain Bogardus.

It was purposed to raise a large proportion of the necessary capital by securing aid from municipalities along the road. The advantages of the proposed railway were painted in rosy colors, and the enterprise became popular. Hillsdale subscribed $100,000, Ypsilanti voted $50,000, although some would have favored $75,000 or even $100,000, and the villages and townships along the road pledged considerable amounts. Among these, the township of Salem voted aid, but, objection being made to its payment from the public funds, the case was brought before the Supreme Court of the State. On May 26, 1870, the Court declared the voting of such aid to railway companies to be illegal and refused to compel the township to issue bonds for the amount. After this decision the bonds already issued were turned back to the townships and municipalities, execpt for Ypsilanti's, $32,700 of which remained in possession of the company. Of the original $50,000 voted, bonds for $17,300 were turned back to citizens who, after the decision of the Supreme Court, had subscribed for stock of the railroad to that amount.

... In 1879, the railroad found itself in financial difficulties, having borrowed $1,100,000, on which sum it was unable to pay interest. In this predicament one-half of the stock of the road was sold to John Alley of Boston, at a discount of seventy percent. Eventually the bond-holders foreclosed the mortgage, bought in the property, and issued new stock among themselves.

In time the road passed into the ownership of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern, now included in the New York Central Lines. The magnificent dreams of the original promoters have vanished. Today, more than fifty years after the incorporation of the road, two plug trains a day, on six days of the week, each train composed of a short string of freight cars with an ancient passenger coach on the end, pull out of the Michigan Central Station, and gently amble down the Huckleberry Line.

YPSI DIXIT

Some say when Grover Spencer became Ypsilanti's first lawyer in the 1870's that he almost had to leave town due to lack of business. But then the second lawyer came to town and they both got rich.

IMAGE PHOTO LAB
Michael Leach
11 East Cross
Toni McCarthy
482-3370

Three more from the 1870's: Where was Oprah when we needed her?

Kindergarten teacher abuses one of her tots

Mrs. Dunham, who came to Ypsilanti in 1871 and served the school in various capacities for seventeen years, is especially well remembered. Her work in the primary grades was markedly original. Professor Estabrook said of her, "Mrs. Dunham was really the first kindergarten teacher in America and the best primary teacher I ever knew."

Mrs. Dunham was an artist and her blackboards were always embellished with lovely pictures made of chalk. Her most famous depicted a cow with an abnormally long tail. Across the tail the names of tardy scholars were written, greatly to the chagrin of the late-comers.

She once punished an unruly boy by putting him in the closet, then went home and forgot all about him till nine o'clock at night. The nearest key to the building was at Professor Putnam's.

Bursting breathlessly into the house, she was greeted by the Professor's announcment, "He's out!"

The janitor had discovered the boy in his round of cleaning.

Switch Stand signs proliferating

Harry Boelter, of the Depot Town Antique Engine Club, has donated yet another railroad switch stand for the good of the block. Mike Veasey, of Tech-Style Junction, has submitted a design for the top and it will soon stand in the Market Plaza as a destination sign for the district. "Depot Town, Ypsilanti, Michigan" will propbably appear in tourist snapshots around the world after its installation.

Were *those* the Good Old Days?

The W.C.T.U.'s Great Calico Controversy

An old-time temperance meeting was held by a visiting lecturer, and a red-ribbon club organized among male total abstainers. At about the same time, 1874, a local organization of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was formed.

Lucy Rice was elected President but protested against the election, as she found it difficult to comply with one of the organization's rules. This rule required that members should wear calico when in attendance at the meetings. She asserted that the season at that time was not far enough advanced for her to lay aside her flannel dresses. The rule eventually being waived, the Presidency was accepted.

Official records defaced

A curious incident was the attempted destruction of the city records in 1874. Some unknown party entered the office of the city clerk, gathered together the records of council proceedings, the justice dockets and other important record books, placed them in a bag and dumped them in the Huron River. Upon the discovery of the bag and its contents several weeks later it was found that the ink had been washed from many pages and much writing rendered illegible. There was varying theories to account for this act of vandalism, one of them being that interested parties had desired to destroy certain court records.

This concludes the excerpts from Colburn's "The Story of Ypsilanti." Watch the November *Rag* for other histories of the area.

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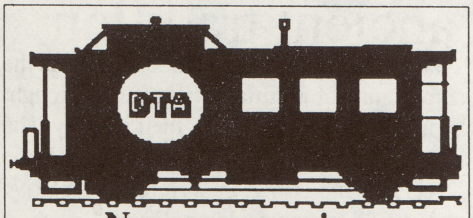

New or renewing DTA members this month:

Mary Ann McDonald
Jack Miller Peter Murdock
Lorna & Virgil Dodd

DTA 3 August 1989

(Due to conflicting Heritage Festival commitments, the monthly meeting was held two weeks earlier than usual. The third Thursday schedule resumes in September.)

Guests: Rick Abdullah, new owner of Red Rooster Pizza & Dairy Bar; Sandee French, co-owner of Aubree's Saloon; Linda French, co-owner of Sidetrack.

Treasurer's Report: The State of Michigan has requested that the DTA pay sales tax on beer sales for Frog Island 1988, which we previously assumed was exempt.

The official cost of liability insurance for the Caboose has been submitted to the DTA but was not available for review.

No treasury figures are available due to this month's early meeting.

Budget/Events: DTA will be running one of two bars in Riverside Park during the Heritage Festival (Friday, 18th thru Sunday 20th)

A letter of intent must be submitted to the City of Ypsilanti if the Winter Jazz Series is to become a viable event for the coming season. The City will need to address the issue of accessibility and review insurance needs for an event of this magnitude to be held at the Freighthouse.

Membership/Volunteers: The call is going out to volunteers for the DTA's Heritage Festival Bar. If you'd like to pour for a shift, call Bettie @ 482-6371.

Thanks go out to our sustaining members along with the reward (?) of their very own copy of The Rag. . . as long as they want it.

Caboose: That darling red piece of a train can be yours -- only $25.00 to rent for your event. Call Gary @ 483-4245.

Engineering Society: If you have a project in your neighborhood or your back-yard, contact the Engineers and let the kids do the job for you. Leave word @ The Old Caboose.

2nd Vice Presidents: No reports.

Other Business:

Linda French is hitting the neighborhood streets as a one-woman **nominating committee** looking for motivated individuals interested in holding a DTA office (with associated power) **Elections** will be held @ the next DTA meeting, September 21.

Thanks to **Carroll Osborn** for volunteering his expertise in compiling material specifications for the much-needed repair to the farm trailer on the Freighthouse Plaza.

The City of Ypsilanti has remained unresponsive to neighborhood calls requesting relocation of the smelly and unsightly North Cross Street **dumpsters.** Tom Dodd generously volunteered to disinfect the dumpsters' present location if it can be cleared in time for our Heritage Festival visitors.

Everybody wants to know about Depot Town! Cable TV's Discovery channel has contacted the DTA requesting information on our neighborhood background, ideas and goals.

Golden Goose Award: to the potent peons who 'reeked' havoc into the Sidetrack's planter barrels.

Best Yet Award: to the c-o-o-o-l breeze that's wafting through the Sidetrack, a newly air conditioned hot-spot in Depot Town.

Special thanks

to those who made the Heritage Fest a reality down in Depot Town:

Judi Monaghan, ARTRAIN
Claire Hall, Food vendors
Tom Dodd , 189 Arts & Craftsers
Carolyn McKeever, Publicity & Promotion
Jack Miller, Exhibits
Ron Miller, for taking all the blame
Jake Guter, DTA beer tent
Margaret Harner, merchant parking permits
Scott & Bruce Sobbry, vendor parking
Bettie Dodd & Grace Sweeney, telephone calling for volunteers
Joe Wizauer, flowers for opening party and Senior Queen Contest
Gary McKeever, Great Train Race
Ike Rednour, Horseshoe Tournament
Linda French, for Sidetrack's offer to cover the anticipated Jazz/beer tent license
Richard Robine & Tim Wise, for making proposals at the YHF Policy meetings.

. . . and to the many, many others who poured beer, hosted the home tour, guided on the ARTRAIN, showed their autos and engines, hosted the arts & craftsers, and aided in the great complexity of the district's biggest weekend of the year!

October 1989

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Foundation
8 p.m. Thursday, 10/5
in The Old Caboose

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 10/12
Freighthouse Coffee Shop

Merchants
5:15 p.m. Thursday, 10/19
at the Old Town Restaurant

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 10/19
in The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday, 10/26
in the Freighthouse Coffee Shop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Jacob Guter, president
c/o The Old Caboose
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Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Active Memberships :
- Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce
- Washtenaw Council for the Arts
- Neighborhood Associations of Michigan

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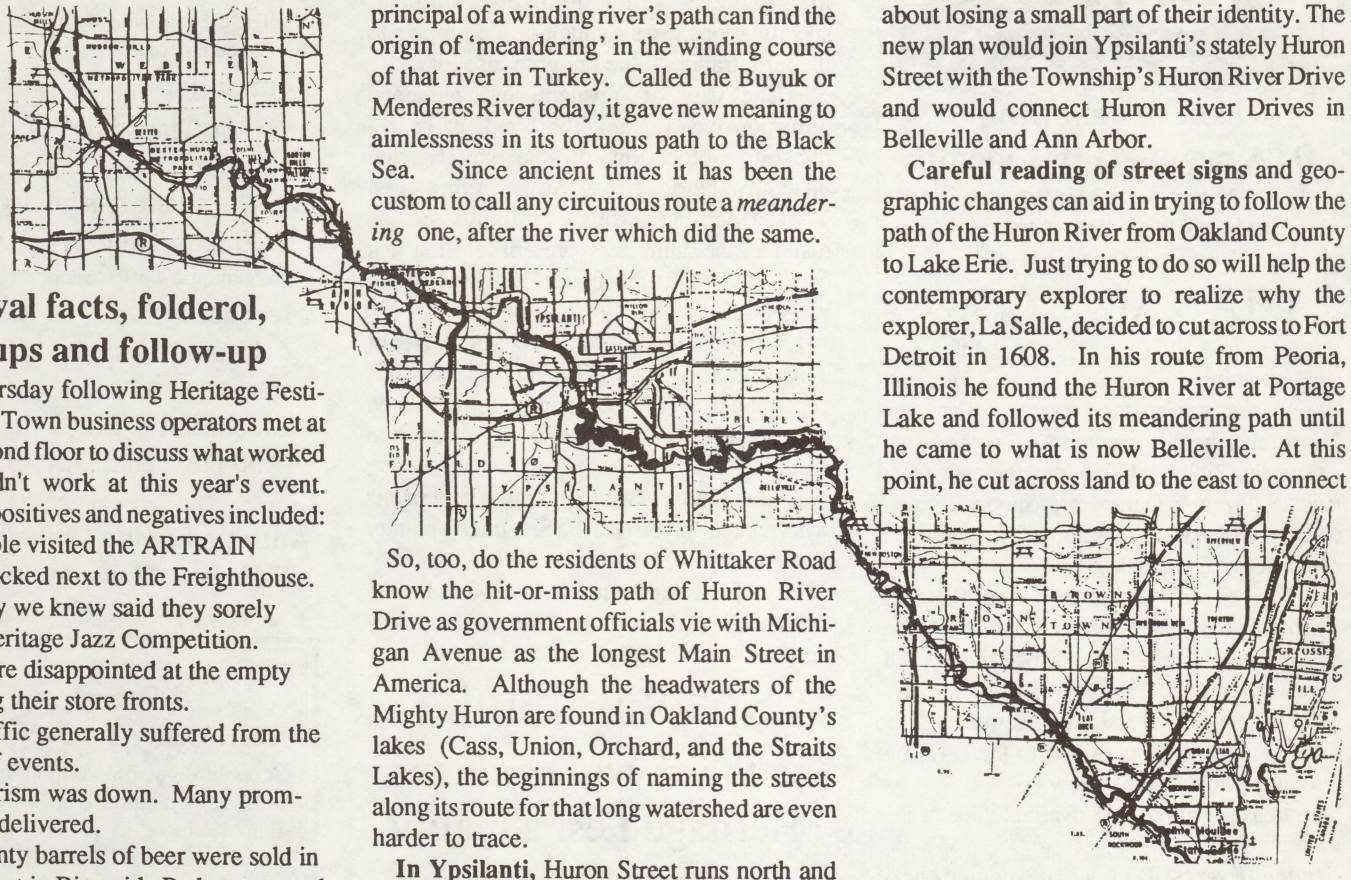
Meandering along Huron River follows ancient tradition



Huron River Drive is almost as hard to find as the Meander River, but anyone who knows the principal of a winding river's path can find the origin of 'meandering' in the winding course of that river in Turkey. Called the Buyuk or Menderes River today, it gave new meaning to aimlessness in its tortuous path to the Black Sea. Since ancient times it has been the custom to call any circuitous route a *meandering* one, after the river which did the same.

So, too, do the residents of Whittaker Road know the hit-or-miss path of Huron River Drive as government officials vie with Michigan Avenue as the longest Main Street in America. Although the headwaters of the Mighty Huron are found in Oakland County's lakes (Cass, Union, Orchard, and the Straits Lakes), the beginnings of naming the streets along its route for that long watershed are even harder to trace.

In Ypsilanti, Huron Street runs north and south, just like the general flow of the River. But in Ann Arbor, Huron Street runs east and west. And the same towns are (almost) joined by Huron River Drive which does not necessarily run continuously along the River — but it's close.

Now the folks who name streets want to change the signs at the I-94 exit to show "Huron River Drive" as the crux, rather than"Huron Street/Whittaker Road" as it now reads. Nobody asked the citizens down in the community of Whittaker what they thought about losing a small part of their identity. The new plan would join Ypsilanti's stately Huron Street with the Township's Huron River Drive and would connect Huron River Drives in Belleville and Ann Arbor.

Careful reading of street signs and geographic changes can aid in trying to follow the path of the Huron River from Oakland County to Lake Erie. Just trying to do so will help the contemporary explorer to realize why the explorer, La Salle, decided to cut across to Fort Detroit in 1608. In his route from Peoria, Illinois he found the Huron River at Portage Lake and followed its meandering path until he came to what is now Belleville. At this point, he cut across land to the east to connect with fur traders at Detroit. In his travels he may have mused on the possibility of damming up that river, dumping trash into it, hunting ducks between condos and spanning it with interstate expressways. Maybe such thoughts encouraged him, too, to turn his back on the Huron River.

Anyone wishing to follow his intended route, can stay dry and follow Huron River Drive, today. But the new street signs probably will not make the trip much easier.

Festival facts, folderol, foul-ups and follow-up

On the Thursday following Heritage Festival, 17 Depot Town business operators met at Aubree's Second floor to discuss what worked and what didn't work at this year's event. Outstanding positives and negatives included:

- 4086 people visited the ARTRAIN which was docked next to the Freighthouse.
- Everybody we knew said they sorely missed the Heritage Jazz Competition.
- Many were disappointed at the empty tents blocking their store fronts.
- Street traffic generally suffered from the new layout of events.
- Volunteerism was down. Many promised, but few delivered.
- Only twenty barrels of beer were sold in DTA's beer tent in Riverside Park, compared to the usual 70 at the Jazz Tent.
- Many were dismayed at the change in the event's date, one week earlier than usual.

Several merchants signed up to more closely monitor next year's doings.

The Ypsilanti Heritage Festival Policy Committee will hold its follow-up meeting this month and interested parties are urged to attend.

Other interesting turns of event coinciding with the Heritage Fest included the appearance of a gigantic blue tarp from the third floor windows of the Thompson Block. Some thought it was preparation for the long-promised paint job on that building, but the crudely lettered "YPSIS" confounded nearly all who observed it.

YPSI, of course, is the Greek goddess of festivals, and some local ethnicists hoped to reaquaint the celebrants with her tradition that 'no good deed goes unpunished.'

Watch these pages for more information on how you can be more involved in making the 1990 Heritage Festival a great success.

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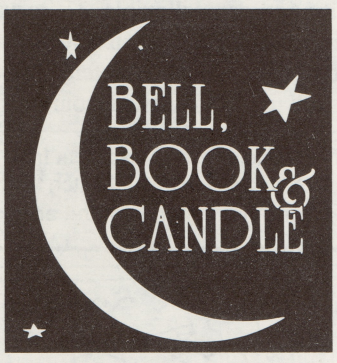

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